



Emergency Management **UPDATE**

January 2002



(VDEM Photo.)

Cramped quarters. Gov.-elect Mark Warner will decide whether to green light a new Virginia Emergency Operations Center (VEOC).

Gilmore urges security funding, new VEOC

Gov. Jim Gilmore's final budget includes proposals for a state terrorism fund and construction of a new Virginia Emergency Operations Center.

The \$20 million terrorism fund, along with anticipated federal dollars, could be used for the mitigation of biological attacks and hazardous materials, search and rescue operations, communications systems and security equipment.

These monies could also fund disaster preparedness assistance and prevention for Virginia's ports or other critical domestic preparedness purposes.

The new VEOC, replacing the 1950s-era Emergency Operations Center behind the State Police Headquarters, would be funded with \$16 million in bonds issued by the Virginia Public Building Authority.

Both proposals will be considered by Gov.-elect Mark Warner and the General Assembly in its 2002 session.

On a related note, the governor's Virginia Preparedness and Security Panel submitted its report on strengthening safety mechanisms to protect Virginians from future terrorist attacks. Gilmore called for the panel's work to continue.

Learn more at www.thedigitaldominion.com/press/news2001/secu1214.cfm.

From 'ordinary' to extraordinary: A hazmat year in review

By Greg Britt, VDEM
Hazmat Field Manager

Looking back on 2001, the year seemed to begin on 9/11, a day no one will ever forget.

We haven't closed the books yet on the physical, mental and financial toll of these attacks. However, the hazmat community had already learned much from events that took place well before that tragic day.

The year began with the usual incidents of overturned tanker trucks and a fixed facility poisonous gas leak — nothing out of the ordinary for most areas, especially in the winter.

Then, a blinding band of February snow showers tested the state's public safety infrastructure to the limit. Slippery highways and poor visibility resulted in three major multi-vehicle accidents within minutes of each other.

A pileup of more than 50 vehicles, including several blazing tractor-trailers, closed traffic in both directions on I-81 at Buffalo Creek in Rockbridge County. The complex chain collision put hazmat responders at a real disadvantage.

Moments later, responders rushed to I-64 in Goochland for a second incident involving a 50-vehicle pileup with several burning tractor-trailers, trapped motorists, potential hazmat spills and one fire fatality.

Minutes after that accident, the third mass collision occurred on I-95 in Northern Virginia. This accident, involving more



The year that was. (Clockwise from top) The Sept. 11 Pentagon attack quickly overshadowed earlier responses such as the I-64 crash and Southwest Virginia flood cleanup. (VDEM photos.)

than 100 vehicles, stretched from Stafford County to Prince William. Local and state resources were understandably pushed to their limits.

These three incidents highlight the importance of regional planning and training. No one locality could have afforded all the resources and manpower needed to manage any one of these three incidents. Localities have had mutual-aid agreements for years, but these compacts must include planning and exercises to maximize their true potential.

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9/11 redefines disaster recovery task forces

By Suzanne Simmons, VDEM PAO Reservist

The events of Sept. 11 redefined disaster recovery for Virginia, creating a whole new category of needs on a larger scale than ever before anticipated.

Across the state, local recovery task forces shifted gears to adjust to the unimaginable, while Arlington County quickly organized its own task force to grapple with the effects of the catastrophic event.

"We're dealing with a lot of collateral damage in Arlington County that we don't get from natural disasters," says Selby Jacobs, Virginia Disaster Recovery Task Force coordinator.

"After floods and hurricanes we help victims with things like furniture and houses or roads — items you can see and count. In this case, it's more difficult to identify the victims. It's harder to determine who needs help."

In addition to the obvious enormous physical losses, the Pentagon attack triggered loss of employment in key industries, such as airports, and industries dependent on tourism, such as hotels and restaurants.

Jacobs says there are also mental health needs in the Arlington community precipitated by the attack. To meet these and other assistance needs, Arlington's infant task force is busily mapping out its recovery strategy.

Finding a formula to meet these new demands may well outline the way local task forces approach recovery following future catastrophic events.

Arlington is not alone in trying to determine the correct formula. Russell and Tazewell counties have two young, but very active local tasks forces.

Developed in the wake of the 2001 summer floods in Southwest Virginia, they were still aiding flood victims on Sept. 11 when the scope of these organizations quickly changed.

"The community is now more aware of the threat we face each and every day. We know what can happen and we have to be ready," says Judy Cooling, Russell County emergency management coordinator. "We're looking at an all-hazards approach right now. We're not limiting ourselves to natural disasters."

Chris Thompson, director of Clinch Valley Community Action, the driving force behind Tazewell County's task force, says the events of Sept. 11 validated the local entity.

"Our efforts were substantiated by the 9/11 incident. Now we know how much we're needed. It also changed how we view the future. We realize exactly how vulnerable we are."

Rockingham County lays claim to the state's first task force, formed after Hurricane Fran hit the state in 1996. Don Driver, director of Rockingham-Harrisonburg Social Services and chair of the task force, believes it can adjust to any new recovery initiatives brought to light by Sept. 11.

"We're so focused on responding to local recovery needs, I can't imagine an incident that we can't adjust to here in



A force to be reckoned with ... Human Services representatives, including a Pentagon Family Assistance Center liaison, were an integral part of Arlington County daily operational briefings after the Sept. 11 attack. Under the auspices of the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, disaster recovery task forces fill gaps in traditional response organization assistance. (Photo courtesy Arlington County.)

Rockingham County," says Driver. "We draw on all of our community resources and we're open to change. We haven't limited our response. We're already trying to solve a perceived sheltering problem if there is ever a catastrophic disaster-related exodus to this rural community."

The veteran local task force proved its flexibility this past summer when a localized flooding event, in which 10 inches of rain fell on the county within three hours, was never declared a state or local disaster.

With a \$50,000 county donation and numerous hours of non-profit volunteer labor, the task force helped 18 families to complete recovery. Roads, heating systems and even a flood-ravaged home were replaced.

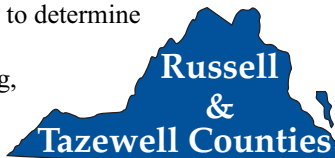
Virginia's recovery task force program is based on the premise that no one understands a victim's needs better than the community in which they live. When traditional response organizations like FEMA and the Red Cross leave town, local tasks forces take over assisting those who either didn't qualify for traditional assistance programs or still have unmet needs.

As the New Year begins, Southwest Virginia counties still assist summer flood victims while adjusting their future strategies to a post-Sept. 11 world.

In Northern Virginia, state, federal and non-profit response groups have moved on and Arlington is drafting its own recovery plan for the unmet needs of Sept. 11 victims.

"No one can be expected to put a community or its residents back to where they were before a disaster," says Jacobs. "A local task force can help victims recover beyond what traditional assistance provides."

For more information on disaster recovery task forces, contact Selby Jacobs at (804) 371-7070.



Cooperation cuts Virginia 2001 forest fire toll

By Bob Lambert, Staff Writer

Despite one of the worst extended droughts on record, extensive preparation and federal, state and local cooperation helped reduce the number of forest fires and total charred acreage to a third of what officials estimated could have been destroyed.

The Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) recorded 999 fires that burned a total of 10,900 acres for the fire season that started Oct. 15. Since Jan. 1, a total of 2,477 fires have burned 21,337 acres.

Neighboring North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky and West Virginia all experienced similar drought conditions but incurred much heavier losses.

State Fire Chief John Miller believes the state's advance preparations and quick response significantly reduced damages.



Fighting for dollars. Under new regulations, localities scrambled for Fire Suppression Assistance Grants. FEMA has given a preliminary nod for three applications: Buchanan, Lee and Scott; Albemarle; and Page. (VDOF Photo by Bill Braford.)

"This fall was the most active fire season since 1963," says Miller. "A burning ban along with our swift response had a big impact on limiting the number of wildfire outbreaks."

He says responders were able to get to the fire scene quickly thanks to pre-positioning of necessary resources. Through its regional office in

Atlanta, Ga., the U.S. Forest Service's Southern Area Coordination Center (SACC) helped state and local fire responders in this effort with aid from VDEM, the U.S. Park Service, National Guard and local fire departments.

"During this fall's fire season, Virginia put a total of 20 federal firefighting crews on the fire line," says Miller.

VDOF Forest Protection Coordinator Fred Turck credited their good working relationship with the VICC and Virginia Emergency Operations Center with facilitating a quick turnaround on resource requests.

"Forest fire training and good incident management are also vital components of forest fire suppression," Miller says.

The VDOF offers a number of annual wildfire training opportunities, including the 2002 Virginia Wildland Fire

Training Academy, which will be held May 18-23 at the Fort Pickett Army National Guard Training Center.

More training information is available on the VDOF Web site at www.dof.state.va.us.

Warner names new Public Safety Secretary

Gov.-elect Mark Warner has named John William Marshall as Secretary of Public Safety for his administration. Marshall, previously the director of the U.S. Marshals Service, served 14 years with the Virginia State Police.

Tornado Drill has new twist for 2002

On Sept. 24, 2001, a series of tornadoes leveled trailers, homes, barns and trees in Culpeper County, Washington, D.C., and parts of Maryland.

In a little over two hours, these twisters took two lives and caused substantial property damage. Now is the time to make sure your community is ready for the next one.

Tornado Preparedness Day offers VDEM, the National Weather Service and local emergency managers a golden opportunity to partner with schools, businesses and organizations in promoting tornado awareness and safety.

Proclaimed by the governor, the event is scheduled for March 26 and features the state's annual tornado drill at 9:45 a.m.

In addition to the drill, a special section on tornado preparedness will be featured on the VDEM Web site, and media kits will be mailed to all Virginia emergency managers and media, including television meteorologists.

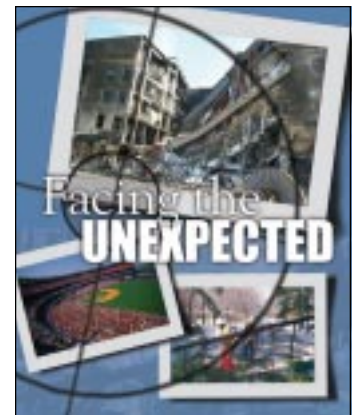
It is also important to note that tornado drills are no longer just a good idea — they are mandated by law.

Beginning this school year, all public schools in Virginia are required to conduct a drill at least once a year. State colleges and universities are also required to make adequate preparations for their facilities.

For more information on Tornado Preparedness Day, contact Rohn Brown at rbrown@vdem.state.va.us or (804) 897-6500, ext. 6519.



It's the law. Educators can choose to participate in the state drill or select a date of their own. Either way, students across the state will soon participate in mandatory annual tornado drills. (Photo of Hanover County's Battlefield Park Elementary School 2001 tornado drill by Bob Lambert.)



Conference to put new face on EM

Facing the unexpected has taken on more urgency than ever since Sept. 11.

Learn the latest strategies and techniques for addressing a multitude of hazards at the Virginia Emergency Management Conference, March 13-15 in Williamsburg.

Sponsored by VDEM and the Virginia Emergency Management Association, the three-day event will feature

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Training Calendar

Emergency Management

Developing Volunteer Resources

Jan. 9-10/Richmond

Basic PIO Course

Jan. 15-17/Richmond

Hazardous Weather & Flooding Preparedness

Jan. 23-25/Virginia Beach

Emergency Planning Workshop

Jan. 29-31/Newport News

Emergency Preparedness

Community Outreach Conf.

Feb. 6/Richmond

Decision Making in a Crisis

Feb. 12/Williamsburg

Principles of Emergency Mgmt.

Feb. 26-28/Virginia Beach

Reservist Training

Decision Making Skills

Jan. 8/Richmond

Hazmat Awareness Training

Feb. 21/Roanoke

Search and Rescue

GSAR Institute (Part I)

Jan. 25-27/Blue Ridge

SAR Council

Jan. 26/Richmond

GSAR Institute (Part II)

Feb. 8-10/Blue Ridge

Technological Hazards

Public Safety Response to

Terrorism (PSRT) — Awareness

Jan. 31/Lynchburg

A Weekend of Terrorism

Preparedness Training

Feb. 16-17/Salem

(Roanoke Regional Training Center)

Contact Pat Collins at (804) 897-6500, ext. 6568, or pcollins@vdem.state.va.us for more information.

Hazmat Year in Review (continued from page 1)

In the heat of summer, Tazewell County fell victim to back-to-back flooding incidents. About 10 inches of rain fell in less than four hours on July 8, forcing more than 300 people to abandon their homes and damaging 700 residences and 50 businesses. (A second storm three weeks later covered a much broader nine-county area.)

The high, fast-moving floodwaters displaced dozens of hazardous material containers throughout the county, creating a major cleanup problem. Home-heating oil tanks were overturned and many basements were filled with petroleum-contaminated water. In a first for VDEM, we used hazmat teams instead of cleanup contractors for the location and recovery effort. The results were very positive, from both an economic and accountability standpoint.

This cleanup continued through to Sept. 11 when America witnessed first-hand the devastating terrorist attacks on the two towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Planes stopped flying, travel came to a halt, bridges and tunnels were closed and thousands of businesses closed for the day.

Less than a month later, we were inundated with thousands of calls regarding anthrax threats and suspicious packages. Many localities looked to state and federal government for quick solutions to the problem. Each day brought changing circumstances and information with no clear-cut answer to the variety of issues at hand. The CDC had to change their protocols for first responders several times with no assurance of a final answer.

In the six weeks from early October to mid-November, the VEOC received approximately **1,000** notifications of anthrax and suspicious packages — a **500** percent increase from the same period a year ago. After dispatching full hazmat teams the first few times, localities quickly changed their response protocols and reduced the resources dispatched.

The playing field has definitely changed for EMs and first responders in 2002. As we prepare for possible deployment of a biological, chemical or explosive device, VDEM will make every effort to provide timely resources and guidance. Clearly, we must all continue to be vigilant, flexible, innovative and adaptable if we're to win the war on terrorism.

VEM Conference (continued from page 3)

speakers from the Office of Homeland Security, Department of Defense and National Emergency Management Association. Sessions include the Arlington County response to the Pentagon attack, promoting public resolve in the face of terrorism, local responses to civil disturbances, the impact of the Baltimore tunnel fire, and the new disaster victims.

More conference details and reservation information is available on the VDEM Web site at www.vaemergency.com or by calling Conventions Plus at (757) 242-3692.



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